

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

---

Savannah Biographies

Special Collections at Lane Library (Armstrong)

---

Fall 1987

## The Life of Joseph F. Gammon

Elizabeth K. Weeks

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/sav-bios-lane>

---

This book is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections at Lane Library (Armstrong) at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Savannah Biographies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

The Life Of  
JOSEPH F. GAMMON

By

Elizabeth K. Weeks  
History 300  
Fall Quarter, 1987

## Abstract

Joseph F. Gammon, a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and a carpenter by trade,<sup>1</sup> came to Savannah, Georgia during the first half of the nineteenth century, probably around 1827<sup>2</sup> and remained in Savannah until his death in 1865.<sup>3</sup> He married a woman from Savannah<sup>4</sup> with whom he apparently had six children,<sup>5</sup> only one of whom survived him.<sup>6</sup> After the death of his first wife, Sarah, of pleurisy in 1853,<sup>7</sup> he married Miss Elizabeth Whitten of Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1854,<sup>8</sup> but the marriage was a brief one as she died of consumption, or tuberculosis, in 1858.<sup>9</sup> Fourteen months later, Gammon was married a third and final time to Miss Margaret McDonald of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<sup>10</sup> who survived him.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Joseph, his brother, Benjamin, and two sisters, Susan and Elizabeth, also came from Nova Scotia to make Savannah their new home.<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, also a carpenter, and fifteen years his brother's junior,<sup>13</sup> inherited Joseph's carpentry tools upon his death.<sup>14</sup>

Professionally, it is possible that Joseph and, perhaps, his brother Benjamin as well were involved in some aspect of shipbuilding, it being one of the most important industries of Nova Scotia at the time,<sup>15</sup> coupled with Savannah's importance as a commercial port.<sup>16</sup>

Although little information can be obtained concerning Gammon's professional life, he was evidently prosperous, having accumulated a personal estate worth, at the time of his death, nearly \$23,000, which included a good deal of real estate situated in the heart of Savannah.<sup>17</sup>

### I. Early Life, First Marriage and Children

The sources currently available for research on Joseph F. Gammon appear to indicate that he probably arrived in Savannah around 1827 or 1828.<sup>18</sup> The Passenger and Immigration Lists Index lists a Joseph Gammon (no age) as having arrived in Savannah in 1832 and the Naturalization Records Index shows a Joseph

Gammon as having been naturalized on January 5, 1832. These two notations would seem to indicate 1832 as the year of Gammon's arrival except for two other pieces of information. Firstly, it is noted in the deed records in Superior Court that Gammon borrowed money using a piece of property, specifically Lot number twenty-five, Columbia Ward, as collateral in September of 1831.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Gammon's daughter, Sarah Jane, is listed in the Georgia Population Census for 1850 as being 21 years of age, which would place her birth date at about 1829.<sup>20</sup>

One obstacle to determining Mr. Joseph F. Gammon's exact date of arrival in Savannah is the existence of another Mr. Joseph Gammon (no middle initial) in the city at about the same time. In most instances, it is possible to distinguish Mr. Joseph F. Gammon by his middle initial, address, references to his occupation, or references to family members. Additionally, the naturalization records for this time period are kept by the Savannah chapter of the Georgia Historical Society and, therefore, are currently unavailable.<sup>21</sup>

Gammon's first wife, Sarah, was between 2 and 4 years his junior and a native of Savannah.<sup>22</sup> Although it seems likely that they would have married after his arrival here, there is no record of their marriage in the Index to Marriages for Chatham County. If they had met and married in Gammon's home country before coming here - a less likely possibility - there would be no record of it in the courts since birth, death and marriage records were not kept by government agencies in Nova Scotia until 1864. Only church records are extant and it would be necessary to know what church to apply to for such information.<sup>23</sup>

Sarah died on December 24, 1853 and was buried on Christmas Day in Laurel Grove Cemetery.<sup>24</sup> The cause of death was listed as pleurisy,<sup>25</sup> or inflammation of the pleura, the membrane which lines the thoracic cavity.<sup>26</sup> Sarah Gammon's death record and the General Index to Keeper's Record Books, Laurel Grove Cemetery

list her age at the time of her death as 52 years, but the stone monument over her grave reads "Aged 50 years". Additionally, the Georgia Population Census for 1850 states her age as 48 years and her husband's as 52 years.

Of the couple's children there is considerably less information. Their daughter, Sarah Jane, born around 1829, is mentioned in the 1850 census as well as in Joseph's will. She married George B. Weedon, a tin and coppersmith,<sup>27</sup> on Jan 20, 1857<sup>28</sup> and resided with him thereafter at the corner of York and Price streets.<sup>29</sup> If the couple had any children at the time of Joseph Gammon's death in 1865, they were not mentioned in his will.

The three grandsons mentioned in Gammon's will appear to have been the sons of Mary Ann Gammon, another daughter, and Samuel Pancost,<sup>30</sup> a local dentist. Samuel, then 46 years of age, and Mary Ann, then 19 years of age,<sup>31</sup> were married on Dec 31, 1848<sup>32</sup> and resided at 100 Broughton street. At some point between 1850 and 1858, Pancost took his family and left Savannah,<sup>33</sup> perhaps after his wife's death.

The four remaining children of Joseph and Sarah are named on the stone monument on Lot number 246 in Laurel Grove Cemetery where their parents and perhaps they themselves are also buried. The memorial reads: "In Memory of Sarah Gammon, wife of Joseph Gammon who departed this life Dec 24th, 1853. Aged 50 years. Also, their children John, Elizabeth Ann, Francis Ann Stone and Joseph Lewis."

Of the six children, only the two boys' death records are to be found at the Chatham County Office of Vital Records. Joseph died on Sep 12, 1835 of fever accompanied by convulsions at the age of four,<sup>34</sup> and John, at the age of five days on Nov 29, 1849 of lockjaw,<sup>35</sup> or tetanus.<sup>36</sup>

Since birth records were not kept in Chatham County until 1890,<sup>37</sup> the only other source of information on the Gammon children appears in the 1840 census

which lists the free white members of the household as being one male between forty and fifty years of age (Joseph), one female between 30 and 40 years of age (Sarah), and three younger females: one between ten and fifteen years, one between 15 and 20 years and one between 20 and 30 years. Additionally, there were eight slaves living with the family.<sup>38</sup>

The first indication of Joseph Gammon's financial condition is given in the Georgia Population Census for 1850, which lists the value of his real estate holdings at \$15,000.

## II. Elizabeth Whitten and Margaret McDonald

Whatever can be said of Mr. Joseph F. Gammon, one thing is certain: he believed in the institution of marriage. On Nov 9, 1854, eleven months after the death of his first wife, he married Miss Elizabeth Whitten, of Newburyport, Massachusetts.<sup>39</sup> He was 55 years old and she was 27.<sup>40</sup> Apparently, Elizabeth's sister, Mary S. Whitten, aged 18, also became a member of the household and continued to be even after Elizabeth's death.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, she was evidently on good terms with her brother-in-law, as he left her a valuable piece of property in his will. Unhappily, Joseph's marriage to Elizabeth ended abruptly three years later with her death by pulmonary tuberculosis<sup>42</sup> on Jan 23, 1858.<sup>43</sup>

Not one to remain solitary for long, Mr. Gammon once again entered into the bonds of holy matrimony with one Margaret McDonald, age 22,<sup>44</sup> of Philadelphia, PA on Feb 10, 1859.<sup>45</sup> The marriage was evidently a happy one as Joseph Gammon referred to her repeatedly in his will as "my beloved wife", and left her a substantial amount of property in addition to the continued use of their home on York and Lincoln streets for the remainder of her life or until her remarriage. Additionally, she, along with his brother Benjamin, was named co-executor of his

last will and testament.

### III. Property Holdings

Of all the information currently available on Mr. Gammon, most notable is the value of his personal estate in terms of real estate located in the city of Savannah.<sup>46</sup> Just when he acquired his property is unclear since only one record of his having purchased a lot of land exists in the Index to Deeds Etc. for Chatham County. That record states that on Aug 3, 1847, Joseph F. Gammon purchased the eastern half of Lot Letter V, 4th Tything, Reynolds Ward and everything on it at a public auction at the courthouse for \$1400.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, Mr. Gammon owned four other pieces of property in Savannah: Lot number 5, Trustees' Garden; Lot number 10, Crawford Ward; Lot number 7, Lafayette Ward; and the northern half of Lot number 25, Columbia Ward, where his residence stood. Also listed, not under real estate, but under personal estate, are two houses (one on Harris street, rented to a Mr. Hartridge, and another, address unspecified, rented to a Mr. King) and a lease on the western half of Lot number 24, Warren Ward.<sup>48</sup>

Lot number 25, Columbia Ward, at the corner of Lincoln and York streets, and the house that stood on it belonged to Gammon in 1831. This ownership is recorded in the Index to Deeds Etc. for Chatham County along with the fact that he obtained a small short-term loan in 1831 and again in 1833 by using this property as collateral.<sup>49</sup> He did this with most of his property, using it as collateral to obtain loans, mostly short-term, on 14 separate occasions between 1831 and 1859 for a total amount of \$10,670.<sup>50</sup> An 1842 newspaper article announced the impending sale of Lot number 25, Columbia Ward, at the city Marshall's sale,<sup>51</sup> however, Gammon still owned the property when he died in 1865, according to his will. This property, also known then as 39 Lincoln street, was Gammon's<sup>52</sup>

residence for many years, evidenced by the fact that it is listed in the available Savannah city directories from 1849 through 1860 as his residential address, and his first two wives, his sons, and, finally, he died in that house.<sup>52</sup> The house itself, a stately-looking federal-style home constructed in the late eighteenth century, was purchased in 1812 by the Methodist Church and later used as a parsonage, according to a plaque which now adorns the building. The current address of the house is 134 Lincoln Street. It is owned by a Mr. and Mrs. R. Jason Grader, who reside there.<sup>53</sup> The long ownership of the house by the Methodist Church<sup>54</sup> suggests a possible connection between Gammon and the Church, a possibility which presently cannot be explored since the Church records are held by the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah,<sup>55</sup> which is currently closed to the public. In his will, Joseph Gammon gave the use of the house to his wife, Margaret, until the time of her death or remarriage, at which time it was to go to his grandson, Albert Pancost, or Albert's heirs. In an attachment to Gammon's will, a notation is made concerning the sale of 134 Lincoln Street for \$1800 in 1930 by the "trustee for A. W. Pancost et al".

#### IV. Civil & Political Involvement

Of Joseph F. Gammon's involvement in civil affairs and local politics there is little mention. It is worth noting, however, that he was a registered voter,<sup>56</sup> that he was a member of the City Board of Health for two consecutive years,<sup>57</sup> that he attended a Whig meeting as an active member in 1853<sup>58</sup> and that he was fined \$40 in 1858 for failing to appear after being summoned as a grand juror in the City Court.<sup>59</sup> The only one of these events which appears to be dubious is Gammon's attendance at the Whig meeting since the newspaper article reporting it names him simply as Joseph Gammon instead of Joseph F. Gammon. He was also apparently involved in doing some construction work for the city as evidenced by two



newspaper articles, one dated 1836 and the other, 1837. The 1836 article which recounts the proceedings of a City Council meeting states that "the account of Jos. F. Gammon for building a boat house was referred to the Dock Committee".<sup>60</sup> The other article, dated 1837, mentions another City Council meeting where "The proposals of Wm. G. Stafford and Joseph F. Gammon for repairing the Exchange were severally read and referred to the building committee with power to act."<sup>61</sup>

### V. Final Years

From 1849 to 1858, Gammon's business address is listed in the city directory as 31 St. Julian street. However, beginning in 1859 and afterwards, only his residential address is listed. This change suggests a possible withdrawal on the part of Joseph Gammon from active participation in his trade, although he is still listed in the 1860 census as a master carpenter by profession. Perhaps he passed the reins to his younger brother, Benjamin, in order to pursue other interests, since he was certainly in a financial position to do so. Or perhaps he withdrew due to illness. His death record states his cause of death on Oct 24, 1865, as a "chronic disease of the cerebro spinal system". If this illness were either debilitating or very painful, such a condition would necessitate early retirement.

When Joseph Gammon died, he left a wife, a daughter, three grandsons, a brother, and two sisters behind.<sup>62</sup> Joseph F. Gammon, native of Nova Scotia, master carpenter, husband, and father was laid to rest in Laurel Grove Cemetery on the day following his death along with his wives and children.<sup>63</sup> He was not a famous man and there are no statues or monuments to commemorate his life, save the one that adorns his grave, but it was common people like him that built Savannah and made it the unique city it now is.

## ENDNOTES

1. Georgia Population Census for 1860, Chatham Co., GA, microfilm, p. 347.
2. P. William Filby et al, eds., Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1982 Supplement (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1983), p. 276.
3. Record of Death, Joseph F. Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
4. Workers of the WPA, comps., General Index to Keeper's Record Books 1852-1938, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia, G-M, Vol. 2 (1939).
5. Grave Marker, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot number 246, Savannah, GA; Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
6. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
7. Record of Death, Sarah Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
8. Index to Marriages, 1851-1866, Chatham County Probate Office, p. 92.
9. Record of Death, Elizabeth Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
10. Index to Marriages, 1851-1866, Chatham County Probate Office, p. 94.
11. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
12. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA; Workers of the WPA, comps., General Index to Keeper's Record Books, 1852-1938, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia, G-M, Vol. 2 (1939).
13. Georgia Population Census for 1860, Chatham County, microfilm, p. 347.
14. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
15. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th Ed., Vol. 13, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1984), p. 274.
16. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th Ed., Vol. VIII, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1984), p. 925.
17. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA; Savannah Board of Realtors, Maps of Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia, (Charlotte, NC: Champion Map Corp., 1986).
18. P. William Filby et al, eds., Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1982 Supplement (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1983), p. 276;  
Georgia Population Census for 1850, Chatham County, microfilm, Roll 64, p. 223;  
Naturalization Records Index, Chatham County, 1792-1908, A-Z.
19. Index to Deeds Etc., F-L, Grantor, 1785-1910, Chatham County, GA; Deed Book 20, p. 516.

20. Georgia Population Census for 1850, Chatham County, GA, microfilm, Roll 64, p. 223.
21. Personal Interview, Ms. Kay Kole, Chairperson of the Geneology Committee of the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah Chapter.
22. Workers of the WPA, comps., General Index to Keeper's Record Books, 1852-1938, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, GA, G-M, Vol. 2 (1939); Grave Marker, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot number 246, Savannah, GA; Record of Death, Sarah Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records; Georgia Population Census for 1850, Chatham County, GA, microfilm, Roll 64, p. 223.
23. Personal Interview, member of the Geneology Department, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
24. Workers of the WPA, comps., General Index to Keeper's Record Books, 1852-1938, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, GA, G-M, Vol. 2 (1939).
25. Record of Death, Sarah Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
26. William Morris ed., The American Heritage Dictionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), p. 1007.
27. Savannah City Directories: 1858, 1859, and 1860.
28. Index to Marriages, 1851-1866, Chatham County Probate Office, p. 278.
29. Savannah City Directories: 1858, 1859, and 1860.
30. Index to Marriages, 1806-1851, Chatham County Probate Office, license No. 3093.
31. Georgia Population Census for 1850, Chatham County, GA, microfilm, Roll 64, p. 277.
32. Index to Marriages, 1806-1851, Chatham County Probate Office, license No. 3093.
33. Savannah City Directories: 1850 and 1858.
34. Record of Death, Joseph Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
35. Record of Death, John Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
36. William Morris, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), p. 766.
37. Personal Interview, Ms. Beverly Wall, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
38. Georgia Population Census for 1840, Chatham County, GA, microfilm, Roll 50, p. 63.
39. Index to Marriages, 1851-1866, Chatham County Probate Office, p. 92.

40. Workers of the WPA, comps., General Index to Keeper's Record Books, 1852-1938, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, GA, G-M, Vol. 2 (1939).
41. Georgia Population Census for 1860, Chatham County, GA, microfilm, p. 347.
42. William Morris, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), p. 287; Henry Alan Skinner, The Origin of Medical Terms, 2d Ed. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Co., 1961).
43. Record of Death, Elizabeth Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
44. Georgia Population Census for 1860, Chatham County, GA, microfilm, p. 347.
45. Index to Marriages, 1851-1866, Chatham County Probate Office, p. 94.
46. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
47. Index to Deeds Etc., F-L, Grantee, 1785-1910, Chatham County, GA; Deed Book 3I, p. 399.
48. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
49. Index to Deeds Etc., F-L, Grantor, 1785-1910, Chatham County, GA; Deed Book 2Q, p. 516.
50. Index to Deeds Etc., F-L, Grantor, 1785-1910, Chatham County, GA; Deed Books: Vol. 2Q, p.516; Vol. 2R, pp. 200, 315, and 499; Vol. 2W, p. 354; Vol. 3E, p. 416; Vol. 3I, p. 451; Vol. 3K, p. 74; Vol. 3L, pp. 160 and 261; Vol. 3P, p. 284; Vol. 3Q, p. 318; Vol. 3R, p. 152; Vol 3S, p. 415.
51. The Daily Georgian, July 4, 1842, p. 3, col. 1.
52. Records of Death: Joseph F. Gammon, Sarah Gammon, Elizabeth Gammon, Joseph Gammon and John Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
53. Personal Interview, Mr. and Mrs. R. Jason Grader, 134 Lincoln St., Savannah, GA.
54. Plaque, 134 Lincoln St., Savannah, GA.
55. Personal Interview, Ms. Norma Gale, Secretary at Methodist Trinity Church, Savannah, GA.
56. Annals of Savannah, Vol. 4, Part 1, 1852, p. 54; The Daily Morning News, April 7, 1853, p. 3.
57. The Daily Morning News, May 5, 1855, p. 1, col. 3; The Daily Morning News, April 7, 1856, p. 2, col. 2.
58. The Daily Morning News, November 29, 1853, p. 2, col. 3.
59. The Daily Morning News, June 4, 1858, p. 2, col. 5.
60. The Daily Georgian, November 2, 1836, p. 2, col. 4.

61. The Daily Georgian, December 9, 1837, p. 2, col. 3.
62. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
63. Grave Marker, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot number 246, Savannah, Georgia.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Annals of Savannah, Vol. 4, Part 1, 1852.
2. Deed Books: Vol. 2Q, Vol. 2R, Vol. 2W, Vol. 3E, Vol. 3I, Vol. 3K, Vol. 3L, Vol. 3P, Vol. 3Q, Vol. 3R, Vol. 3S.
3. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., Vols. 13 and VIII, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1984).
4. Georgia Population Census for 1840, Chatham County, GA, microfilm.
5. Georgia Population Census for 1850, Chatham County, GA, microfilm.
6. Georgia Population Census for 1860, Chatham County, GA, microfilm.
7. Grave Marker, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot number 246, Savannah, Georgia.
8. Henry Alan Skinner, The Origin of Medical Terms, 2d Ed. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Co., 1961).
9. Index to Deeds Etc., F-L, Grantee, 1785-1910, Chatham County, GA.
10. Index to Deeds Etc., F-L, Grantor, 1785-1910, Chatham County, GA.
11. Index to Marriages, 1806-1851, Chatham County Probate Office.
12. Index to Marriages, 1851-1866, Chatham County Probate Office.
13. Naturalization Records Index, Chatham County, 1792-1908, A-Z.
14. P. William Filby et al, eds., Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1982 Supplement (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1983)
15. Personal Interview, Ms. Norma Gale, Secretary at Methodist Trinity Church, Savannah, GA.
16. Personal Interview, member of the Geneology Department, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
17. Personal Interview, Mr. and Mrs. R. Jason Grader, 134 Lincoln St., Savannah, GA.
18. Personal Interview, Ms. Kay Kole, Chairperson of the Geneology Committee of the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah Chapter.
19. Personal Interview, Ms. Beverly Wall, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
20. Plaque, 134 Lincoln St., Savannah, GA.
21. Record of Death, Elizabeth Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
22. Record of Death, Sarah Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.

23. Record of Death, John Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
24. Record of Death, Joseph Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
25. Record of Death, Joseph F. Gammon, Chatham County Office of Vital Records.
26. Savannah Board of Realtors, Maps of Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia; (Charlotte, NC: Champion Map Corp., 1986).
27. Savannah City Directory: 1850.
28. Savannah City Directory: 1858.
29. Savannah City Directory: 1859.
30. Savannah City Directory: 1860.
31. The Daily Georgian, Nov 2, 1836.
32. The Daily Georgian, December 9, 1837.
33. The Daily Georgian, July 4, 1842.
34. The Daily Morning News, April 7, 1853.
35. The Daily Morning News, November 29, 1853.
36. The Daily Morning News, May 5, 1855.
37. The Daily Morning News, April 7, 1856.
38. The Daily Morning News, June 4, 1858.
39. Will of Joseph F. Gammon, September 14, 1865, Chatham County, GA.
40. William Morris ed., The American Heritage Dictionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981).
41. Workers of the WPA, comps., General Index to Keeper's Record Books 1852-1938, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia, G-M, Vol. 2 (1939).